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ABSTRACT

Available test score evidence does not support the common claim that student achievement has declined. On the other hand, the existing evidence cannot be used to prove that student achievement has risen. This paper offers reasons why student achievement in the past cannot be compared accurately with student achievement today: (1) tests, curricula, and student populations change; (2) background data are unreliable; and (3) test administration is inconsistent. The paper also discusses three assessments that have commonly been used by those trying to compare student achievement over time--the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The paper asserts that it is impossible to know exactly how much better or worse American students are doing today compared to students in the past. School improvement, while important and necessary, should not be based on the false belief in "a golden age of education from which we have fallen." (Contains 12 references.) (LMG)

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